



Trip Report - Cape Town Pelagics - Saturday, 21 January 2023

Trip Highlights: Three species albatross, Manx Shearwater, a large pod of Dusky Dolphins.



Our group met at 08:00 on Saturday morning at the Simon's Town Yacht Club before setting off on our pelagic tour. Although it was a relatively wind-free morning, it had been quite windy overnight and over the previous few days, and False Bay was therefore a bit choppier than usual. As we set off from Simon's Town harbour towards Cape Point, we soon started encountering a few coastal seabird species such as **Cape Cormorants**, **Hartlaub's Gulls**, **Kelp Gulls** and **Greater Crested (Swift) Terns**, as well as a couple of rafts of **African Penguins** out on their first foraging outings for the day.

The conditions appeared to be just right for fishing, and several small fishing vessels were dotted across False Bay. Just beyond our safety check-in stop at Cape Point, we got some **Cape Cormorants**,

one or two **Sandwich Terns** and a handful of **Greater Crested (Swift) Terns**. Heading out slightly further, we encountered the first **Sooty Shearwaters** of the day, and soon afterwards we started coming across a few groups of **Cory's Shearwaters**. We veered slightly off course to investigate a distant flurry of activity, which turned out to consist of **Greater Crested-** and **Common Terns** following a smallish pod of **Dusky Dolphins**.

According to our Automatic Identification System (AIS), there were no fishing vessels in the Cape Canyon area, however a potential trawler was picked up several miles to the north. When we got there, it was indeed a trawler with its nets set out, and a good cross-section of bird species were hanging around in the vessel's wake; including **Shy Albatross**, **Black-browed Albatross**, **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross**, both **European Storm Petrel** and **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, **Brown Skua**, **Common Tern**, **Arctic Tern**, **Great Shearwater**, **Sabine's Gull**, **White Chinned Petrel**, **Kelp Gull**, **Cape Gannet**, **Northern Giant Petrel** and **Southern Giant Petrel**. We kept cruising around the fishing boat for an hour or two, but by the time we needed to head northwards again, it had not pulled in its nets.



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Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross

Between the Cape Canyon and Cape Point, we continued to come across a one or two of the species seen previously during the day, but when we investigated another large mixed flock of birds actively feeding, we came across the real treat for the day, namely a large pod of ± 500 **Dusky Dolphins**.

En-route back to Simon's Town we enjoyed lunch and cold drinks in a relatively calm spot overlooking the Cape of Good Hope National Park. Our last stop was at Partridge Point where we visited the **Bank Cormorant** colony, which also hosted a few **White Breasted Cormorants** and **Cape Cormorants** and the **Cape Fur Seal** hang-out, which also produced **African Oystercatcher**. We then finally returned to harbour after a wonderful day of birding out at sea, however the day had one last surprise in store for us, namely an **African (Cape) Clawless Otter**, which first swam around and then got onto our boat, probably looking for a spot of lunch.

Pelagic species seen and approximate numbers:

Shy Albatross	30 - 50
Black-browed Albatross	5
Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross	2
Northern Giant Petrel	1
Southern Giant Petrel	3
White-chinned Petrel	300
Spectacled Petrel	0
Cory's Shearwater	300
Sooty Shearwater	250
Great Shearwater	200
Manx Shearwater	1
Wilson's Storm Petrel	50 - 80
European Storm Petrel	80 - 120
Cape Gannet	80
Parasitic Jaeger	6
Pomarine Jaeger	0
Brown (Subantarctic) Skua	5
Sabine's Gull	80
Arctic Tern	30

Coastal Species:

Hartlaub's Gull	30
Grey-headed Gull	1
Kelp Gull	300 - 500
African Oystercatcher	3
White-breasted Cormorant	20
Bank Cormorant	20
Cape Cormorant	200
Reed Cormorant	0
African Penguin	150
Sandwich Tern	10
Great Crested Tern	200
Common Tern	80

Marine mammals:

African (Cape) Clawless Otter	1
Brown (Cape) Fur Seal	100
Dusky Dolphin	500+

Trip report: Cape Town Pelagics guide - [David Swanepoel](#)

A message from Cape Town Pelagics: A huge thank you to our experienced skippers who are able to safely lead us to the best birding areas and skillfully manoeuvre the boat into just the best position while all on board are busy concentrating on the birds! Coordinating a pelagic trip over a year in advance with guests from all across South Africa and different countries around the world requires an organised office team. We thank them for their special eye for detail - and for the sometimes last-minute rearrangements and frustration if the weather delays the trip to another day! Our biggest thank-you is to our Cape Town Pelagics guides who take time out of their work, often involving seabirds and conservation, and time away from their families, to provide our guests with a world-class birding experience. Cape Town Pelagics donates all its profits to seabirds, and so all the participants who join the trip make a contribution towards bird research and conservation - a big thank you from all of us.



Great Shearwater